

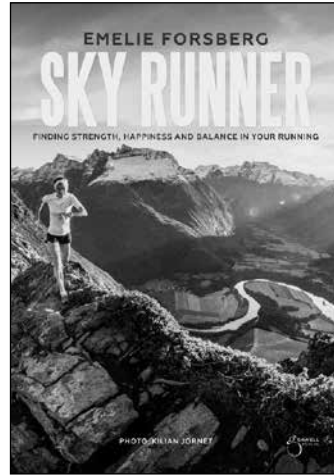
Sky Runner: Finding Strength, Happiness, and Balance in Your Running

By Emelie Forsberg (author) and Kilian Jornet (photographer)

Blue Star Press, 2018, 178 pages.

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I LAST SAW EMELIE FORSBERG ON A Christmas Eve in Mendoza, Argentina. She was holding up her then-boyfriend Kilian Jornet by the waist, helping him walk out of a bar after celebrating his run of 37 miles up and down the nearby mountain of Aconcagua, tallest peak in the Western Hemisphere, in just under thirteen hours. I had also just climbed Aconcagua, though it had taken me two weeks with a guided expedition.

That was 2014. Jornet was then 27 years old and had recently appeared on the cover of *Outside* and been featured in *The New York Times Magazine* for his speed-mountaineering exploits. Forsberg, then 28, played a supporting role to him—to literal effect, as he stumbled out of that Mendoza bar with an arm slumped over her shoulder—even though she was the reigning female champion of the Skyrunner World Series, a new sport of running up and down mountains.

I wondered: When will Forsberg be the center of attention? Now seems like a fine time. The Swedish athlete is offering a glimpse into her world with her first book, *Sky Runner*, which adds to the tally of recent memoirs by ultrarunners, including Jornet's *Run or Die* (London Penguin, 2013) and Scott Jurek's *North: Finding My Way While Running the Appalachian Trail* (Little, Brown, 2018). While *Sky Runner* is not the tell-all narrative that I'd hoped for, it offers a lens into the life of one of the world's greatest mountain athletes.

“My hope is that I can motivate others to take their time,” Forsberg writes. “Take time to run. To stop. To choose a life beyond the ordinary.”

Sky Runner is filled with stunning photographs taken by Jornet. The two are now engaged, live on the northwest coast of Norway, and continue

to dominate the world of trail running and ski mountaineering. In 2015, Forsberg set a new record in Alaska's Mount Marathon 5k, considered the toughest 3.1-mile race on the planet, finishing minutes ahead of the next female, who was the defending NCAA Division I steeplechase champion. Forsberg really is that fast.

When I met Forsberg and Jornet at Aconcagua, my curiosity was piqued: *What was their secret?* We all shared base camp. We all waited in line to use a rickety outhouse. (One night the wind ripped its tin door off its metal bolts—the door was reattached, but those sitting inside worried.) I frequently spied their stockinged legs protruding from their moss-green tent as they sipped tea inside. They seemed so normal.

Sky Runner divulges few secrets. Forsberg shares recipes, yoga stretches, and training workouts. I never felt as if I got to know Forsberg herself. She's so in the zone that it seems hard for her to explain how she does what she does. On downhill running, she instructs: "In order to have speed downhill, it's important to not look at your feet. You must look ahead of you to be able to plan each step. You can practice this! Try the next time you run downhill!" Easier said.

The book ends in 2017 with Forsberg and Jornet on Cho Oyu, the world's sixth-highest mountain, without oxygen and with minimal acclimatization. Jornet is about to go on to challenge the Everest speed record by summiting in seventeen hours without the assistance of fixed ropes or oxygen. For this moment though, he plays the supporting role to Forsberg.

—Stephen Kurczy